Reflections on engagement from a community liaison committee for a zinc mine in rural South Australia

Abstract

Conflicts between mining operators and local communities often stem from the latter feeling excluded from decision-making processes. Consequently, regulators sometimes commission a representative consultative group to facilitate interactions among the wider community, miners and regulators. The realised effectiveness of this sort of representative group, however, has rarely been assessed from the perspectives of community participants. We interviewed members of a long running consultative committee for a zinc mine in rural South Australia. Initially, the town's inexperience with mining meant many held negative views about potential environmental impacts of mining. Those fears were allayed as the mine developed and the committee felt they better understood and could question the mine's technical operations. Over time, the committee felt their input led to significant changes in a range of mine operations and, while perceiving their committee's role differently, all thought it effective and strengthened their relationship with the mine operator and regulators. Nonetheless, some negative interactions from the initial stages of engagement have lingered. We conclude that if community trust is gained by operators and efforts are made to help communities understand mining, then consultative committees can play a central role in ensuring that people do not feel disenfranchised by mining operations.

Key Words

Stakeholder engagement; Social Licence to Operate (SLO); Community Consultative Committee; Mine closure; Corporate Social Responsibility

1. INTRODUCTION

A key factor causing the emergence of social conflicts in mining is a lack of participation of local communities in decision-making processes, which in some communities can build on a distrust of mining companies and governmental regulators (CSIRO, 2014; Conde, 2017). The concerns expressed by local communities about mining are the product of perceived impacts on the environment weighed against the local social-economic benefits/costs of extracting resources, moderated by the relationships that exist between the community and miners (Moffat & Zhang, 2014). Thus, contested issues can sometimes be driven by trust, or lack thereof, among the parties involved and resolutions prevented by the weakness of these relationships. Hence, an overly negative perception of impacts by local communities can potentially be caused by a poor consultation experience with miners, even persisting from the start of engagement, years before a mine actually becomes operational (Walsh, et al., 2017). Whilst no amount of goodwill can necessarily ameliorate all concerns, nor should concerns be minimised if predicted impacts warrant attention, access to early information and participation in the decision-making process can ensure that the community feels empowered and may lead to greater trust on the part of both company and regulator (Booth & Halseth, 2011). In general, increased public participation during the planning and early stages of a mine's life will positively impact community perceptions of environmental and social issues (Booth & Halseth, 2011; Moffat & Zhang, 2014), although there is ongoing debate about what factors truly motivate engagement with communities by the mining industry (Kemp & Owen, 2013).

Community consultative groups are often created by government agencies to facilitate the interaction between mining companies, the community and state regulators (Department of Planning and Environment, 2018). These committees are described in several international best practice guidelines for the industry, such as the International Finance Corporation Performance Standards (IFC PS), where they are an integral part of the required Environmental and Social Management System under PS1, Risk Management (IFC, 2015). Broadly, the role of community consultative groups is to relay information, concerns and responses among the community, miners and regulators, although the aims of specific groups differs by project and among jurisdictions. For example, the committee for a nickel mine at Ravensthorpe in Western Australia was put in place to assist the town in adapting to the onset of large-scale mining in the region (Mayes, 2015). Whilst the committee of the Kanmantoo copper mine in South Australia has a broader stated purpose: *"ensure effective and ongoing communication and consultation process with the local community"* (Department of State Development, 2014). Regardless of specific aims, a key function of all such groups is to help ensure that public contributions are valued as part of the decision-making process (Booth & Halseth, 2011).

Formal community consultative committees are now becoming common across the mining industry in Australia and worldwide (Department of Planning & Environment, 2018). However, this was not always the case. One of the first community consultation groups was formed in South Australia in 2003, during the exploration phase of a magnesite project in a farming/rangelands area (Horn & Miller, 2004). In that case, the group was considered successful in educating community members about their potential future development and addressing community concerns to create collaborative declaration of environmental factors (Horn & Miller, 2004). Other studies on consultative groups have focussed on 'classic' mining towns (McDonald, et al., 2012; Ntema, et al., 2017; Ott, 2017), where the entire economy is much more reliant on the commodity and has been that way for generations. None of these studies have specifically interviewed consultative committee members about their experiences on such committees, how participation in a consultative group subsequently influences community members' perceptions about mining or how their participation may affect the relationship between miners and their stakeholders over time.

1.1 Angas Zinc Mine Case Study

The Angas Zinc Mine (AZM) provides a unique opportunity to assess the effectiveness of community engagement four years post-closure of mining operations. The mine is located on the Fleurieu Peninsula, South Australia approximately 60 km south-east of the state capital Adelaide (population ~ 1.3 million) and 3 km from the rural town of Strathalbyn. Terramin Australia Ltd. (Terramin) acquired the deposit in 1991 and has since owned and operated the project. The mining licence was awarded in 2006 and the first ore was mined later the same year. The AZM entered care and maintenance in 2013 following a prolonged drop in metal prices, resulting in the retrenchment of 115 people (Harris et al., 2014). During operations, the site consisted of underground access, a polymetallic float processing plant and tailings storage facility (TSF) (Terramin, 2017). Whilst much of the underground workings have been backfilled, the processing plant is still present on site. The possibility of reutilising this facility to process gold from the nearby Bird-in-Hand project, 35 km to the north, is currently being considered (Terramin, 2017). The AZM still has an existing indicated and inferred resource of 1.2 million tons at 5.8% Zinc and Lead.

The town of Strathalbyn has a population of 6,500 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Prior to the opening of the AZM the Strathalbyn economy was, to a significant extent, dependent on agriculture and on those working in nearby urban areas, such as Adelaide, but living and spending their income in the town. There is little other mining activity in the region (SA Centre for Economic Studies, 2006) and, as such, Strathalbyn would not be classified as a typical Australian "mining town" (Ecklund 2015) or dependent economically on mining. There has been a complex and dynamic relationship between the local Strathalbyn community and

Terramin, with a distinct anti-mining presence in Strathalbyn at the start of operations, appearing regularly in the local media at the time. It must be noted, however, that the level of anti-mining resistance might still be considered relatively low (c.f. Conde & Le Billon, 2017). In response, the Strathalbyn Community Consultative Committee (SCCC) was decreed by the state government minister responsible for mining in 2006.

The committee generally consists of eleven members, representing several stakeholders: local businesses, schools, doctor, council representatives and other community members. Whilst some of the current members have been present since the inception of the committee, others have left or joined as the project developed. The committee initially met monthly, though for most of the mine life they have met in public, quarterly. The purpose and aim of the SCCC is laid out in their Terms of Reference, which are to raise and discuss any issues that have been brought to light regarding the AZM, acting as a forum for engagement between Terramin and the local community (Terramin, 2015).

This case study therefore provides a unique opportunity to assess, post-closure, perceptions about the effectiveness or otherwise of a community consultative committee in an area with limited experience of mining and where there had been high levels of community concern prior to mining. Specifically, we investigated the effectiveness of the community consultation from the committee's perspective by interviewing members about their views on four key areas, as follows:

- Their perceived and realised environmental concerns, and how these were dealt with across the mine life;
- How the engagement strategy implemented by the mining company was received by the community;
- How they saw the effectiveness of the Community Consultative Committee; and
- Whether they had any recommendations for similar future committees set up elsewhere, based on their personal experiences on the committee.

By doing this, we aimed to investigate how committee members saw their role as well as what they thought might be learnt, given this experience, for future community engagement initiatives involving similar committees, miners and government regulators.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study used semi-structured, iterative interviewing - aiming to seek, explore, describe and analyse the experience of individuals (Tracy, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2016) - interviewing eight of the current eleven members of the SCCC. Interviews took place over a three-week

period in 2017, primarily in the homes of each participant, though public establishments and a participant's workplace were used in three cases. The interviews each lasted between 40 and 90 minutes. During the interviews, participants were given the opportunity to talk about their experience of the AZM and SCCC, requiring little prompting in most cases.

A topic guide, used for interviews, was developed by reading and summarising minutes from committee meetings from 2006 through to 2017, a total of 49 sets. Across all of the meetings, key environmental issues were identified as being the TSF, trucks and dust, and noise and blasting. Further to this, any comments regarding communication between Terramin and the community were recorded. Completing this allowed for the creation of a topic guide and questions for interviews. Minutes provided a summary of environmental concerns; therefore, the topic guide focused on the perception committee members had of the SCCC through analysis of their background, reason for joining, preconception of environmental concerns and how these were dealt with. The success in dealing with these concerns, informing the wider community and how a CCC could be implemented elsewhere with improvements made were also covered. Although following the topic guide, questions were adapted and adjusted during interviews to reflect emerging themes and the interviewee's interests.

We used a content, or framework, method to analyse the interviews, identifying themes and generating a matrix from the transcribed statements (Mayring, 2000; Moerman, 2017). A criterion was formulated based upon the research questions and a feedback loop (Mayring 2000), was implemented to deduce the four key themes: Environment, Mine Closure, Engagement Strategy, and the Effectiveness of the SCCC. Interviews focused around these topics, using the prevalent environmental concerns as a central focus point. The initial interviews also allowed emergent themes to be identified, and hence influence questions asked in the preceding interviews.

3. RESULTS

The eight members interviewed had a range of experience working on the SCCC, ranging from two to eleven years. Five members had been on the committee since its inception. All interviewees stated that, prior to the opening of the AZM, they had very little or no experience of the mining industry. Across the interviews, conversations were focused on the community, the committee, the mine itself and mine personnel. There was a notable lack of discussion focused on the regulator, with limited exceptions. To this end, the regulator was rarely described as a main actor or facilitator in interactions between the mine and the community.

3.1 Environmental Concerns

Environmental concerns were expressed frequently across the interviews, however, there was a consensus that many of the early concerns of members were not realised. For most interviewees, this disparity in their concerns could be attributed to an initial gap in their understanding of the proposed mine. Other early environmental concerns within the broader community were commonly considered to have been a result of scare mongering, in part based on a limited knowledge of technical aspects of mining, but also to a level of distrust and an initial poor relationship with the mine operator and regulator.

One example where initial concerns of the community appeared not to have manifested was disturbance from trucks. Throughout the meeting minutes there were complaints and examples of concerns regarding the movement of trucks on and away from the site. Although procedures were put in place to mitigate these issues, at least in the minutes of committee meetings, truck movements were regularly brought up as items of concern within the committee. However, during interviews trucks scarcely came up, with two members stating that the low number and distance from the town would not cause any issues should the processing plant re-open. Others explained how the mitigation techniques were successful or did not mention any concern over trucks. Dust and noise were also scarcely mentioned, although neighbours next to the mine explained their legitimate concern. Across Strathalbyn, the preconceived fears voiced in early meetings did not eventuate as major issues during operation according to the interviewed members:

> *"I lived in the town and you don't hear a damn thing."*

> *"…we had moved into Strath, and to be honest I really couldn't hear the mine. The drag out and all that was all fixed, so there was nothing coming from the mine."*

One specific part of the mine operations that was brought up in most interviews, however, was the TSF, which has clearly caused much concern over the life of the mine and continues to be an issue for many committee members. The TSF was mentioned as a major item on more than ten occasions in the minutes of the consultative committee meetings and committee members remembered raising concerns from the design stage about its strength and durability. Indeed, the committee's insistence on this issue resulted in additional design features being put in place; namely, a double lining in the TSF, leading to a more heavily engineered system than technical experts deemed necessary (J Randford pers. comm.). Behind issues associated with the engineering of the TSF was a more general concern about the placement of the TSF and fears that leakage might contaminate the important water courses in the area, notably the Angas River and Lake Alexandrina. These concerns persist today, however the committee members felt they had a much better technical understanding

of the issues involved. Indeed, a number of interviewees said that it was through meetings with the mine operator that they had come to a better understanding of the potential for contamination and acid mine drainage in ground and surface water run-off and the possibility of associated long-term impacts.

Consequently, when the water level in the TSF unexpectedly rose above maximum levels set under licensing conditions due to a particularly wet period, the community had great concerns about this and used the SCCC as a method of expressing these concerns to the mine and regulator. Historically, this issue caused tension between the community and the mine for a considerable duration (2009 – 2013), which reflected the difficulty the mine had in lowering the level of water in the TSF. Although the committee members accepted that lowering water levels whilst maintaining mine operations was technically difficult, they felt that the pressure they put on the mine and the regulator via the committee was an important factor in the mine eventually lowering the water levels into compliance with licence conditions. Despite these actions, some members felt some questions relating to the long-term plans for the TSF remain unanswered and the length of the process in resolving these has frustrated some committee members.

Once the mine entered care and maintenance, there was a distinct shift in concerns associated with the TSF. Although the underlying issue of potential contamination remained, the most prevalent concern of the committee became rehabilitation plans for the TSF. Current plans involve drying out and then capping the TSF with compacted clay and revegetating the surface with soil and grasses (i.e. a phytocap; Waste Management Association of Australia, 2006); Terramin has received an industry award for their design. Several interviewees expressed questions regarding the technology; though accepting that it may be the best solution available, they also expressed ongoing doubts regarding engineering and logistics.

Although the closure plan has been well described throughout meetings, several members questioned aspects of this; in particular, who would be responsible for the long term monitoring of the site once the regulator has signed it off and the company has left. In addition, the prospect of the company reutilising the processing plant and TSF to process ore from a new gold mine, 35 km to the north, and trucking in the ore for processing (Harris, et al., 2014; Terramin, 2017) has raised further questions amongst committee members. Although disturbance from truck movements was one of the initial environmental concerns held widely in the community, there now seemed to be little concern about additional trucks bringing in ore to the site as part of the new enterprise. Again, most concern was now related to more technical components, such as the TSF, specifically about potentially changing its chemistry by introducing additional tailings from the new project, but also reflecting an ongoing lack of

faith that the regulator and mine operator would be able keep the facility in compliance with licence conditions, were operations to be started up again.

3.2 Engagement Strategy

The engagement strategy used by Terramin was controversial and differing opinions were held across the committee. The presence of the SCCC was deemed by all to be effective in at least some respects and the mine's participation in this is seen as a genuine effort to engage with the community, albeit this had changed and improved markedly over time.

The initial community engagement that took place via a town hall meeting was described very negatively by several participants, with suggestions that it was not carried out in a respectful manner and that the mine's representative was dismissive of locals. Committee members felt that the mine's representatives had not understood that locals had little prior experience with mining and thus were unable to understand much of the information that was presented to them. Use of technical mining terms and jargon that the community was unfamiliar with was felt to have magnified fear about potential impacts:

> *"I am sure it [lack of mining knowledge] did exaggerate the fears a bit, and the senior management of the company really didn't help at the beginning. That changed I think throughout."*

> *"I think the committee has got on a lot better with Terramin over the last 4/5 years. I think this has meant people haven't got so many worries."*

> *"…he [the mine representative] basically just said we are ignorant pigs and know nothing about mining"*

The effects of the negative initial engagement experiences have been long-lasting and were still considered as representative of the company, at that time, rather than individuals, even though the mine employees directly involved had long since left the company. However, all but one of the interviewees stated that the engagement strategy carried out by Terramin had improved significantly over the mine life and that community engagement associated with the potential to re-open the processing plant to service the new gold mine was being done in a much more transparent and informative manner. In particular, efforts by the mine operator to help the community learn about mining were appreciated, along with the company recognising that the technical mining terms they use in everyday communications amongst workers often need to be explained when talking to community members.

The committee also recognised the efforts implemented by Terramin to provide external experts and presentations to explain different aspects of the mine. Indeed, they felt they had been able to develop a deep knowledge and history of the AZM that they may not have

otherwise had. This was seen as good community engagement practice, however, there were some issues with the credibility of experts associated with water management across the site. Furthermore, the interviewees felt that it took a long time to resolve the non-compliance of the TSF and to address questions about this and future revegetation plans, which consequently appeared to lead to a persistent level of distrust in the mine and the regulator, despite other increasingly positive interactions with the mining company.

3.3 Effectiveness of the SCCC

There were differing opinions on the purpose of the SCCC and each person judged the effectiveness of the SCCC against different, personal criteria. Overall, four key purposes of the SCCC were identified through the interviews, numbers in brackets are number of interviewees identifying each purpose:

- A channel to learn more about the mining industry and process (3);
- A platform to ask questions, both personal and from the community, a sounding board, representing the conscience of the community (4);
- A communication interface, where fair and open discussion can occur between regulator, miner and community, representing the voice of the community as, per definition, it is community driven and consultative (5); and
- A platform to ensure the miners are being honest, keeping mining operations within regulated limits and ensuring that the regulator is effective in ensuring these aspects and their ability to communicate this to the wider public (4).

Thus, all members identified that the committee was effective in addressing their personal and broader community concerns about the mine's activities. For most, this was by being a means through which they could learn more about mining generally or ask questions specifically about the mine's operations. Additionally, the SCCC provided a focus for dealing with at least some issues quickly and was evidence that the mine would respond to community concerns. For example, it was noted that, during blasting, if a complaint was made, the operators responded quickly and that, consequentially, potential ongoing issues had been avoided. But members also saw an environmental compliance role for the committee and believe that, without them, government regulations may not have been adhered to in the same way, or community concerns dealt with. Indeed, some felt that the remediation techniques put in place, such as those to reduce the water level in the TSF, would not have occurred without persistence from the committee.

Committee members felt that their committee represented a good cross-section of the community, with well-connected networks within it, and so was a legitimate group to represent

the views of the community and to pass information from the mine back to them. They also recognised that the regular meetings of the SCCC had been instrumental in breaking down barriers with mine personnel. They noted that the more aggressive nature of meetings at the start of the process had lessened as communication became more effective and trust between the three parties: committee members, government regulator and mine personnel, had built over time. Indeed, they now saw the mine operators as more approachable and willing to answer their questions

A dominant theme in the discussions about whether the SCCC had been effective was the shift in engagement practice between the mine and the community over time. To that end, there appeared to be a decrease in community concern about the mine's activities over time; a trend that the interviewees interpreted as evidence for the committee having been effective. Interviewees noted that, at the start of mining operations, there were many questions coming to them during day-to-day conversations within the community, but that these sorts of conversations have now become less common, suggesting to them that much of the initial angst about the mine and potential environmental impacts has been allayed:

> *"It's not everyone, just people now and then who ask a question about the mine but nowhere near like it was at the beginning."*

Indeed, the members suggested that even those who were distinctly anti-mining at the early stages appeared to have fewer concerns:

> *"…a lot of those people came to the meetings in the first two or three years, that seems to have scaled right back, though I guess will rise again when there is more mining activity there, people will probably have the same questions or even different ones, I don't know. I think the community is pretty accepting of what has gone on so far."*

> *"Concerns tailed off after a while, once the committee had been established and most of their concerns had been addressed in one way, shape or form, most of them pulled back."*

In fact, rather than widespread community concern, several interviewees perceived most residents in Strathalbyn appear now to be largely unaware of the mine and operations,

> *"…a lot of the people in Strath now don't even know there is a mine here. I don't think people are pro or against they just aren't aware."*

> *"New people only just moved in down the road, they only just got here, a month, they didn't know the mine was even here"*

> *"The mine doesn't have any impact on the average person in Strathalbyn"*

> *"You know I don't think most people in this town would even know there was a potential for water contamination."*

Similarly, apparently limited community concern about the proposal to potentially start up the facility again to process ore from the new, external, gold mine was also seen as a sign that Terramin have improved on their engagement strategy. Interviewees suggested this was likely due to previous pressures from the SCCC and that Terramin have learnt from these – particularly on aspects such as early engagement, transparency and listening to community input. Although there was a concern that some issues, particularly regarding noise and contamination from the TSF will resurface, the committee members felt that there was generally much less community concern, which indicates that issues are being dealt with in a more collaborative and respectful manner than at start of the life of mine:

> *"I just don't know how much the processing plant sitting on the ground will bring noise. We have talked about regulation and they are keeping us informed on what their processes are."*

> *"…but I think people are more prepared to ask questions… I think the committee has helped that way in making people confident enough to say I can't solve it for you but I can ask the question."*

3.4 Member Recommendations

Based upon their experiences, each interviewee was asked what they would recommend to a future committee, in terms of aspects that have worked well and suggested improvements for the SCCC or a similar committee for another mining operation. Two broad themes emerged, focussed on early engagement strategy and committee structure, largely reflecting the SCCC as it currently operates and more recent engagement experiences with the mine.

Effective and well-informed community consultation from early in the development cycle was considered vital, along with open communication channels that prevail throughout the process. Although also covered in other parts of the conversations, education about an otherwise unfamiliar industry was mentioned specifically in this part of the interviews by three respondents - noting that access to experts is needed to ensure the technical, e.g. science and engineering, aspects of the project are fully understood by the committee, which in turn can help to ensure the community both understands and can allay previously misguided fears prior to mine commencement.

Suggestions for the makeup and running of the committee broadly reflected how the SCCC currently operates. Five members noted the importance of a mediator or chair who is independent from the mining company and regulator, and is viewed as not being in favour of, or against, mining. One person noted the importance of terms of reference, but also that these should also include prescribed length of tenure, which the SCCC currently does not have.

There were also suggestions about attributes of committee members. For example, there was a view apparent in three interviews that committee members must be locals who are involved in community activities and have a vested interest in the ongoing mining operations – whilst also ensuring that, collectively, the committee needs to be representative of the community, also mentioned in three other interviews. This would presumably also include those not directly affected by the mine. There was, however, little discussion about how such members should be selected or appointed.

Three interviews noted that committee members need to have a proactive attitude and approach issues with an open mind. Similarly, another mentioned that committee members need good communication skills to share information with the wider community, which would be important for increasing transparency and allaying concerns where they are unfounded. There was no discussion on whether training in such skills could or should be provided, nor whether any other training or support was needed in the way the committee functioned. One member did mention the increasing need for access to the internet and email and that this was sometimes difficult in a rural location where people may not have easy access to hardware or connections; they suggested that a tablet or other device might be provided to help ensure this is possible.

4. DISCUSSION

Our interviews revealed that the members of the Strathalbyn Community Consultative Committee saw their committee as an important vehicle for the Angas Zinc Mine operator, Terramin, to engage with the local community surrounding their mine in the Adelaide Hills in South Australia. While members had varying views on exactly how they saw the role of the SCCC, there was consensus that the committee had been useful for dealing with preconceived resistance that often precedes a mine development in many parts of the world (Conde, 2017), particularly in an area with little to no experience of modern mining. There was a consistent theme from interviews that the community had learnt much about mining through a long (10+ years) and sustained involvement of the SCCC and a belief that Terramin had also probably learnt a lot about the community in return. Both were now seen as better placed to engage, albeit there was still a memory of negative early interactions that persisted for some SCCC members.

It was evident throughout the interviews that the community members accept that mining can potentially bring economic wealth, social and even environmental benefits to a region, however, most participants did not see much evidence of these benefits occurring at Strathalbyn. Essentially, interviewees saw the mine as being a peripheral activity in their local

community. Consequently, in line with Zhang & Moffat (2015), they did not feel any pressure to compromise their integrity with respect to environmental concerns because of the potential economic benefits of the mine. While most felt they knew a lot more about mining from their tenure on the SCCC, none felt they had become advocates for the mine and still saw their role as necessary to keep both the company and the regulator in check.

There was broad agreement that many of the perceived environmental concerns at the start of the mine were either dealt with quickly or were not realised, with the exceptions of noise for nearby neighbours and a single occurrence of high dust levels during construction. Although members might now dismiss many such concerns as alarmist, they saw past concerns as legitimate given the low level of understanding of mining that existed previously within the community and because the information that was given to them did not take this into account. Nonetheless, it appears that the committee still maintain similar, albeit lessened, fears over environmental degradation, particularly to do with the long-term management of the TSF. In part, this may be linked to a fairly lengthy period when the water levels in the TSF rose past their licenced maximum and the apparent difficulty the mine had in reducing this, despite calls to do so from the SCCC, as well as fear of the unknown due to the highly technical nature of the problem and solution. As another example indicating a level of distrust throughout the interviews, revegetation was identified as having been successful at the AZM, with long term residents noting, very positively, that the site already has an improved appearance from previous mining operations due to the abundance of new plantings put in by Terramin. However, interviewees felt that revegetation would have been far less without the SCCC, so they saw this as a visible outcome of the effectiveness of their efforts rather than giving credit for this to the mining company. Indeed, a number of committee members saw part of their role as keeping a watch on the mine and whether the regulator was enforcing compliance with licence limitation, and to push for better outcomes than might otherwise occur. Although this may not have been part of the terms of reference for the SCCC (Terramin, 2015), many on the committee saw this as a key function.

Despite clear evidence that engagement had improved over time and that information from the mine was now much more readily received, the interviews pointed to a level of ongoing scepticism about Terramin and the government regulator which appear to have persisted from initial contact; however, it must also be noted that the regulator was scarcely mentioned during interviews. This mirrors a study by Walsh et al. (2017), where a lack of trust in a mineral sands project in rural Australia was rooted in a lack of information being shared, partly because what information was provided was framed in a technical way that the community could not easily understand, and also because the community saw the miner as not being forthcoming with information unless specifically asked. Some of distrust at Strathalbyn also seems to stem from

the personalities of key mine personnel involved and/or perceptions of them by the community in the early stages of development, rather than just what information they did or did not provide. In three of the interviews, the personalities of regulator, miner and community members were specifically mentioned in a negative way. Most notably, the company CEO, who was an initial point of contact with the community was still spoken about negatively, often in comparison with efforts of subsequent staff that were viewed much more positively. Again, similar responses occurred in the study by Walsh, et al. (2017) and the same conclusions can be drawn – mining companies must select representatives for consultation carefully and that early engagement matters greatly, so must be done well.

Across Australia there is a distrust in government regulators of mining and environmental activities (CSIRO, 2014), which was mirrored here at the AZM. However, this study, amongst others, illustrates how a somewhat sceptical community can still want a mutually beneficial relationship with miner and regulator, even when they do not necessarily see great economic benefits of that activity (Pini, et al., 2010; Walsh, et al., 2017) or, indeed in this case, view the mine as peripheral to their local community. Irrespective, a mutual understanding from all parties is vital to success, with proper community engagement and taking the time to explain and to discuss solutions to technical issues in a way that all stakeholders can participate and comprehend.

Recent studies have emphasised the importance of procedural fairness in underpinning trust between a company and its community and thus playing a key role in developing a constructive relationship between a mine and a local community (Lacey, et al., 2017). Communities see procedures as fair when they feel decision processes are legitimate and, ideally, they also have opportunity to participate in these processes. In this case, the lack of prior understanding of mining in the AZM community meant that there was an imbalance in the information available to different stakeholders, which could be viewed as precluding the community from participating in decision making in an informed way. This point was repeatedly mentioned in interviews as a problem for the community. Similarly, the efforts of recent Terramin staff to provide information the community needed via the SCCC were also reflected on positively in interviews. Thus, by empowering the community with information they need on mining via the SCCC, the operator has helped to redress the knowledge imbalance among stakeholders and, in turn, possibly helped to increase the perception of procedural fairness within the community (Lacey, et al., 2017).

The recommendations made by participants for a future committee reflect previous recommendations in literature (McDonald, et al., 2012; Lacey, et al., 2017; Walsh, et al., 2017), and stress the need for early and transparent communication. Similarly, the interviewees strongly supported having structures such as the SCCC as a legitimate means for the

community to communicate with the company. Indeed, many of the recommendations written under the International Finance Corporation Environmental and Social Management System guidelines for stakeholder engagement are emphasised by this study, including: starting early consultation; providing opportunity for two-way dialogue; disclosing meaningful and accurate information; and documenting to keep track of issues raised (IFC, 2015). Thus, at the AZM, despite the apparently less than ideal start to engagement, Terramin has clearly worked to improve the relationship between community, regulator and company and is now meeting many of these guidelines.

Although we only interviewed a small number of people from one location in South Australia, this is the first formal study to investigate what value people derived from participating in a consultative committee associated with a mine. Potentially, the results from this study might reflect that, at least after it closed, the relatively small AZM was not seen as a major issue in Strathalbyn and the town was not dependent on the mine economically; albeit there are still some ongoing concerns in the committee about the post-closure environmental management of the mine. Clearly, the AZM and SCCC have been something of a learning curve for all parties involved, but a clear message from the interviewees was that they saw value in participating in a consultative committee, both personally and for their community. We suspect these results will match others' experiences in many other places but suggest further research such as this is needed to explore when and under what circumstances consultative committees function effectively and less effectively.

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